

## Postdivorce Father-Adolescent Closeness

*Research indicates that closeness of the father-child bond following parental divorce is associated with better outcomes for children and adolescents. Unlike other investigations, this study takes a long-term developmental approach to understanding stability and change in postdivorce father-adolescent relationship closeness. Drawing on Add Health data (n = 483), we examine factors that explain (a) why some high-quality father-adolescent relationships remain the same after divorce whereas others decline, and (b) why some low-quality relationships are stable following divorce whereas others improve. High mother-offspring relationship quality and offspring feelings of well-being prevented close father-offspring relationships from deteriorating. Offspring's childbearing and cohabitation following parental divorce increase closeness in father-offspring relationships that were not close prior to divorce. Although a majority of offspring experienced a decline in closeness following divorce, results from this study show that some very close father-offspring relationships are maintained and some poor relationships become closer.*

Research indicates that children who feel close to their father following parental divorce experience better outcomes than those who do not (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; King & Sobolewski, 2006). Closeness is particularly important for

child well-being because divorced fathers who have such bonds with children can be more effective in monitoring, communicating with, and teaching children, thereby allowing the social capital inherent in the father-child relationship to be realized (Amato, 1998; King, Harris & Heard, 2004). Further, high levels of closeness foster the transmission of parents' human, financial, and other types of resources to children (Nord & Zill, 1996).

Rather than examining factors immediately surrounding divorce such as family conflict and shifts in economic resources, this study takes a long-term developmental approach to understanding stability and change in postdivorce father-adolescent relationship closeness. Initially, the extent to which fathers, compared to mothers, are less close to adolescent offspring is taken into account. Added to this is the recognition that adolescence is a period when offspring are distancing themselves from their parents, a trend that may be exacerbated by divorce. The heart of the study is identifying adolescent behavioral traits and experiences prior to divorce as well as young adult role transitions that have the potential for affecting father-offspring postdivorce closeness. Examined are the mother-offspring bond, offspring's extrafamilial experiences (school attachment, group membership), sense of well-being, and the adult role transitions of leaving home, post-high school educational experience, working for pay, becoming a parent, and cohabiting or marrying. The questions the study is designed to answer are Why do some close father-adolescent relationships remain the same and others decline? Why do some less close father-adolescent relationships remain stable whereas others improve?

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The life course perspective has four central themes that help to organize the conceptual framework for this study (Elder, 1994). First, father-offspring relationship trajectories are best understood within their historical context. Second, the timing and sequencing of events are linked to the offspring's stage of life. Third, children and parents are active rather than passive in shaping their social environment. Fourth, the interdependence of lives over time emphasizes that people's decisions and circumstances affect the lives of others.

### *Historical Context*

Although fathers' involvement with children has increased in recent decades (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2006), mothers continue to do the majority of child care (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). There is nearly uniform agreement that the manner in which men and women parent their children differs in fundamental ways. Mothers tend to be more temporally and emotionally involved with their children than fathers (Collins & Russell, 1991; Russell & Saebel, 1997). Few fathers share the primary parenting role with mothers (Coltrane, 1996).

The many barriers created by father's physical separation from offspring following divorce means that fathers, being the less close parent before divorce, would have to increase their investment in the relationship just to maintain predivorce levels of closeness, something the vast majority of fathers do not do. Fewer than a third of nonresident fathers communicate with their offspring once a week or more (King, 1994; Manning & Smock, 1999). Of those fathers who regularly communicate with their offspring, 40% have relationships that involve open communication, setting reasonable limits, and providing support (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Combining those estimates indicates that a small minority of nonresident fathers have a very active and involved authoritative relationship with their offspring following divorce.

A second historical trend is an increase in the awarding of joint legal and, more rarely, physical custody (e.g., Cancian & Meyer, 1998). Legal and physical custody arrangements in the divorce decree often do not match the reality of what happens or where children actually wind up living, however (Maccoby & Minookin, 1992). Most children end up residing primarily with their mother, and mothers tend to have a much greater

role in childrearing decisions (Sobolewski & King, 2005).

### *Timing and Sequencing of Events: Adolescence Distancing From Parents*

The assumption here is that the effect of divorce on father-offspring relationship quality depends on the child's stage of development and age. Adolescence is a period in which youth are developing biologically, cognitively, emotionally, and interpersonally within the major contexts in which youth spend time: family, peer group, romantic relationships, and school (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). At the same time, gendered behavior is being solidified (Furstenberg, 2000), and youth are gaining autonomy. The important feature of these changes for this study is that adolescents are distancing themselves from parents while increasing involvement with peers. Distancing coupled with divorce may result in exacerbating declines in father-offspring closeness. By comparing the decline in father-offspring closeness reported by youth whose parents have divorced with those whose parents did not, we obtain an estimate of the extent to which divorce exacerbates the typical decline in father-offspring relationship quality. Adolescents may also distance themselves from their mothers, but that decline is likely to be less than it is for fathers (Collins, 1990). Offspring's age and stage of development are also likely to alter the direction and amount of father-offspring closeness over time. So far as we know, no research compares the influence of divorce on father-offspring relationship closeness for younger and older adolescents.

### *Adolescents and Parents as Active Participants in Shaping Father-Adolescent Closeness*

Prior research indicates that children of all ages are active in shaping their environment (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003; Kerr & Stattin, 2003), including parents' attitudes and the quality of within-family behavior. A recent study indicates that this finding also applies to nonresident father-adolescent relationship quality, including feelings of closeness (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2005). With respect to parental activity, recent trends indicate that fathers are becoming more involved in their children's lives both before (Amato et al., 2006) and after (Cancian & Meyer, 1998) divorce. Although the numbers appear to be small, the trends show no sign of abating.

Although fathers are often less involved than mothers, it does not mean that prior to divorce they do not have a significant influence on offspring's experiences and traits, thereby having the potential for influencing postdivorce father-offspring relationship closeness. Lamb's (1976, 2004) work shows that fathers engage in unique activities with offspring that shape their gender identities, interpersonal relationship skills, and intellectual development, making father involvement an important component of offspring development, despite fathers' relatively lower levels of involvement compared to mothers.

### *Interdependence of Lives Over Time*

The interdependence between parents and their children shapes offsprings' experiences and future relationships deep into the life course (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Parental divorce and the departure of the father from the household challenge the integrity of father-offspring relationships and tend to press all fathers and offspring toward diminishing closeness (Furstenberg & Harris, 1992). Reflecting the interdependence of lives over time, we propose a set of adolescent behavioral traits and experiences prior to divorce and a set of young adult role transitions that have the potential for influencing the course of father-offspring closeness following divorce. These traits and experiences may have genetic roots but are also the result of early in-home experiences and parental socialization. Extrafamilial resources may also play a role in their development. Each is described below along with its potential for maintaining or changing the closeness of father-offspring relationships.

*The mother-offspring bond* is consistently linked with long-term offspring adjustment and competence (Park & Buriel, 1998). Because the quality of the mother-offspring relationship is positively correlated with the father-offspring relationship, it is likely that offspring who are close to their mothers also benefit from close relationships to their fathers (Amato & Booth, 1997). Close parent-offspring bonds enhance children's ability to cultivate meaningful and close relationships with others, which may be an important component in maintaining a postdivorce father-offspring relationship. It may have the opposite effect, however, by providing offspring the security needed to let the paternal relationship erode because of the difficulty in maintaining it. A poor mother-offspring bond

may lead youth to enhance the father-offspring relationship to gain additional social support following divorce. Also, fathers may feel obligated to compensate for a poor mother-child relationship.

*School attachment* reflects whether teachers and staff are perceived as fair, friendly, and interested in student progress and the extent to which the student is embedded in the school community (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). School attachment is positively related to school performance and skill building and negatively related to risky behavior and other adjustment problems (Dornbush, Erickson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Wentzel, 2002). It also foretells future educational, occupational, and family formation success. Although school attachment often has its roots in the quality of life at home, it also has an independent influence on offspring well-being and even protects the individual from adverse home conditions (Masten, Best, & Garmez, 1990). On one hand, embeddedness in the school community may provide youth with social support and resources that enable offspring to maintain a close relationship with their fathers or may protect them against declining father-offspring closeness. On the other hand, fathers may feel they should help their children who are doing poorly in school and may enhance their relationship with them in the process.

*Group membership* provides adolescents with opportunities for identity development, enabling them to become less dependent on their family and to establish valuable social ties with both adults and peers (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Participation in voluntary organizations early in life paves the way for social participation as young adults (Smith, 1999). Because many adolescents are in the process of building this aspect of their lives, we can envision them decreasing their investment in maintaining relationships with their fathers, especially following divorce when the relationship is difficult to sustain. Consistent with this proposition is the finding of Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2002, pp. 174 – 185) that court-ordered visitation is sometimes resented by youth because it interferes with time spent in group activities. Fathers, however, may view organizations that encourage joint participation by parents and offspring as another venue for strengthening or maintaining their relationship.

*Sense of well-being* is an individual quality that combines feelings of personal efficacy and control with life satisfaction. We include it here

as an omnibus indicator of offspring well-being prior to divorce that may be linked to postdivorce father-offspring relationship closeness. Like group membership, well-being may act to sustain, improve, or decrease father-adolescent closeness.

*Postadolescent transitions to adult roles* represent life course changes that also have the potential to influence father-offspring closeness. Although preliminary studies suggest that such changes increase distancing (Aquilino, 2005), a more detailed analysis is warranted. Youth who leave home may have greater freedom to either change or maintain father-offspring closeness. Offspring form their own families, and fathers may become interested in grandparenting, leading to relationship closeness. Youth may enhance their relationship with their father in order to induce fathers to help out with a loan to attend school or with introductions that put offspring in touch with new job opportunities.

#### *Control Variables*

Age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status may influence the direction and amount of father-offspring closeness following divorce. In terms of offspring's age, fathers and older offspring may be less motivated to maintain a close relationship as offspring gain autonomy and spend more time with peers during late adolescence (Furstenberg, 2000). Fathers may reconnect with older offspring years after divorce occurs, however, as offspring leave their mother's household, become young adults, and acquire new adult roles.

Changes in father-offspring closeness may also vary by offspring's gender. Although some studies find little or no association between father closeness and offspring's gender (Cooksey & Craig, 1998), other studies of both two-parent families and nonresident fathers suggest that fathers are closer to sons than to daughters (Harris & Morgan, 2002; King, 2002). On the basis of these findings, sons are likely to have closer relationships with fathers prior to divorce and may be less likely than daughters to experience a decline in father-offspring closeness.

With respect to race, some studies show that Black adolescents are closer to their nonresident fathers than Whites (King et al., 2004), and some studies find that Black fathers have more contact with their nonresident children compared to other races (King, 1994; Seltzer, 1991). Other studies find no differences between Whites and Blacks (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Less is known about

Hispanic nonresident fathers, but there is some evidence that involvement is lowest for this group of nonresident fathers (King, 1994; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Racial differences in nonmarital fertility, divorce rates, and socioeconomic status may contribute to racial differences in father-offspring closeness before and after divorce.

Socioeconomic status, usually measured by parents' education or income, is consistently related to child well-being, resident and nonresident father involvement, and payment of child support (King, 1994; King et al., 2004; Seltzer, 1991). We examine both mothers' and fathers' educational attainment as factors that may influence postdivorce father-offspring relationship closeness.

Age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status may also moderate the association between offspring's experiences and traits and postdivorce father-offspring closeness. For example, childbearing may increase the probability of maintaining a high level of father-offspring closeness or may increase closeness if it occurs when offspring are older but may reduce father-offspring closeness if offspring are teenagers and unprepared for parenthood.

Interactions with offspring's age, gender, race, and parental education are examined to determine whether patterns of stability and change in closeness differ for early versus late adolescence, for sons versus daughters, across racial groups, or for offspring from lower versus higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

#### *Specific Aims*

We incorporate the four central themes of the life course perspective by examining how relationship closeness changes with the occurrence of divorce. Relationship trajectories are influenced by experiences and relationships established well before divorce occurs, by the stage of offspring's development, and by the active participation of both fathers and offspring in shaping their postdivorce lives. We examine the extent to which mothers are closer to their adolescent offspring even when fathers reside in the home. Next, we explore the extent to which divorce exacerbates the decline in father- and mother-child relationship quality that typically occurs during adolescence and young adulthood.

We then turn to linking offspring's familial and extrafamilial experiences, sense of well-being, and transition to adult roles to specific trajectories

of father-adolescent closeness over a 5-year period. We explore two sets of trajectories in father-offspring relationship closeness. First, we delineate the factors that differentiate offspring who have a high-quality relationship with their father and retain it in the face of great obstacles from those whose relationship declines following divorce. Second, we identify the factors that differentiate offspring who have a low-quality relationship with their father and improve it following divorce from those for whom it remains at a low level. We also examine the links between offspring age, gender, and race/ethnicity as well as parental socioeconomic status and the father-offspring closeness trajectories.

### METHOD

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health is a longitudinal survey of high school and middle school students in the United States. The initial sample consists of respondents interviewed in 1994–1995 and obtained from a stratified random sample of all U.S. high schools. Approximately 90,000 students filled out in-school self-administered questionnaires. A subsample consisting of a core sample from each cluster of schools plus selected special oversamples of about 20,000 adolescents was drawn from the school sample for an in-home portion of the survey. Face-to-face interviews were used to collect information from respondents and a parent or parent figure (usually the resident mother) in the in-home stage of the survey. Adolescents, but not parents, from the 1995 in-home sample were reinterviewed in 1996 and again during 2001–2002. Response rates for the three waves were 78.9%, 88.2%, and 77.4%, respectively. Approximately 15,000 adolescents participated in all three waves of the survey. The data for this study came from Waves 1 and 3.

Many subpopulations were oversampled, including Blacks from well-educated families and Chinese, Cuban, and Puerto Rican adolescents. When appropriate sample weights are used, the data are a nationally representative sample of adolescents in Grades 7–12 at the time of the first wave. See Harris et al. (2003) for a more detailed description of the data collection process.

For the purposes of this study, we began with a subsample of respondents with valid sample weights living with both biological parents during the first wave of interviews who participated in all three waves of the study ( $n = 7,689$ , 51%).

The question used to construct the household roster was used to determine the household composition of each respondent. The question was "Please tell me the first names of all the people, other than yourself, who live in your household. If someone usually lives with you, but is away for a short time, include him or her..." Although the majority of two-parent households consisted of married parents at Wave 1 (over 90%), we combined married and cohabiting parents for our final samples. Analyses of married parents only produce similar results to those from the larger sample. Biological parents who remained together in the same household across all three waves ( $n = 4,920$ , 64%) and for whom we had complete data on offspring's relationship with both parents at Wave 3 were included in our sample of families who did not experience a divorce ( $n = 4,800$ , 62%).

Respondents were not asked directly whether their parents had divorced since the first wave, but we were able to obtain this information indirectly for our sample of respondents whose parents were together in Wave 1 but subsequently separated or divorced before Wave 3. Respondents' knowledge of whether their biological mother and father were alive at the time of the third interview and whether the mother and father were still living together was used to determine parental divorce. If respondents' biological parents were no longer living together, and both still alive, we counted them as divorced or recently separated. A total of 570 respondents (7%) were living with both biological parents at the first wave and had experienced parental separation or divorce sometime before the third wave. Fifteen percent of this initial sample did not provide complete information on their relationship with their fathers during the third interview. As a result, our sample was reduced to 483 (6%) cases for our analyses of change in nonresident father-offspring closeness between Waves 1 and 3. Respondents who did not provide Wave 3 information on their nonresidential fathers did not differ significantly from those who did in terms of predivorce levels of father-offspring closeness, age, gender, and socioeconomic status, suggesting that the sample is not biased by the lack of complete information.

Although there are risks in defining divorce in this manner, we utilized all information available to us to obtain an accurate estimate of the number of offspring experiencing the departure of their father from the household by Wave 3. We do

not regard the fact that a few fathers could be in the military, away on business, or attending school as a serious bias in our results. The U.S. Census estimates that only 1.4% of married persons are in this category (Fields, 2003). The combination of information from various sources appears to yield a strong measure of parental divorce or separation. The decision to include permanent separation in the definition of divorce is consistent with the practice of combining the separated and formally divorced in analyses of family instability (Bumpass & Raley, 2003; Sweet & Bumpass, 1987). Demographers regard marriage as effectively ended when the couple permanently separates (Morgan, 1988). The vast majority of those who separate become divorced in a relatively short time (Ruggles, 1997).

Most adolescents at Wave 1 were young adults by Wave 3. The long interval between the first and third interviews presents two advantages. First, the long period means that increases and decreases in stress associated with divorce will stabilize before Wave 3 for the majority of subjects. The usual period of adjustment is from 12 to 24 months (Amato & Booth, 1997). Second, the 5-year period is when transitions to adulthood that have the potential for altering father-offspring closeness (e.g., leaving home, becoming a parent) occur.

### Measures

*Change in closeness.* At each interview (1995 and 2000), youth were asked, "How close do you feel to your father?" and "How close do you feel to your mother?" Respondents answered on a five-point scale with categories *not at all*, *very little*, *somewhat*, *quite a bit*, and *very much*. All five categories are used to compare father's and mother's predivorce levels of closeness. To create four categories of stability and change in closeness (high and decreased, low and increase, consistently high, consistently low), the response categories of very much and quite a bit were coded *close* and the categories of somewhat close, very little, and not at all were coded *not close*. The combined categories were used to estimate the factors that were linked to stability and change.

### Independent Variables

Our measures of adolescents' predivorce experiences and relationships come from the first wave

of offspring interviews. A series of dichotomous variables representing respondents' family, education, and work-related experiences during the transition to adulthood were created using information collected during Wave 3, at the same time that the divorce data were obtained. We have no way of knowing whether these experiences preceded or followed parental divorce. Nevertheless, the data are adequate to obtain an indication of the extent to which divorce and young adult transitions are related to father-offspring relationship quality.

The dimensionality and validity of multiple item scales were checked using factor analysis and alpha reliability techniques. All scales represent unidimensional constructs. Fewer than 5% of the cases were missing for all continuous variables. There were no missing data for the dichotomous variables. Missing cases were replaced with imputed values using the expectation maximization algorithm (Allison, 2001) in SPSS. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analyses are summarized in Table 1.

### Predivorce Predictors

*Mother-child bond.* The mother-child bond measure is a scale comprising four items that reflect the quality of the adolescents' predivorce relationship with their mothers. Respondents were asked how much they agree (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) with the following: their mother is warm and loving, their mother discusses and helps them understand things they do wrong, they are satisfied with the way they communicate with their mother, and they are satisfied with their overall relationship with their mother.

*Group membership.* This measure reflects the frequency of respondents' participation in two activities: team sports and religious youth groups. We tested a number of additional items that represent involvement in a wider range of activities such as hobbies, exercising, rollerblading, skateboarding, and bicycling. Although all measures provided the same results, we cannot be certain that these additional items actually represent involvement with peers, so we limited our measure to just two items. Respondents provided a count of the number of times in the past week they played a team sport and the frequency of attending religious-based youth activities (e.g., youth groups, Bible classes or church choir) in

Table 1. *Independent Variables for Respondents Experiencing Parental Divorce: Descriptive Statistics (Weighted)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	$\alpha$	Wave
Adolescent gender	0.52	0.50	0 – 1		1
Adolescent age	15	1.60	12 – 18		1
Parent's education	5.33	2.11	0 – 9		1
Mother-offspring bond	0.50	0.17	0.01 – 0.71	.85	1
School attachment	3.82	0.80	1 – 5	.74	1
Involvement in group membership	0.28	1.52	–2.00 – 3.01		1
Adolescent well-being	4.13	0.56	1 – 5	.86	1
Left mother's household	0.56	0.50	0 – 1		3
Post-high school education	0.54	0.50	0 – 1		3
Employed at least part-time	0.69	0.46	0 – 1		3
Live with biological children	0.19	0.39	0 – 1		3
Married	0.14	0.34	0 – 1		3
Cohabiting	0.13	0.34	0 – 1		3

Note: Unweighted  $n = 483$ .

the past year. Unfortunately, the way the question was asked does not estimate participation in seasonal sports that were not active at the time of the interview. Because the two variables are not on the same time scale, we created  $z$  scores so that each variable had a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The standardized items were summed.

*School attachment.* The relationships among all school-related items were tested using factor analyses. To measure respondents' school attachment, we chose three items to create a unidimensional scale of the extent to which respondents *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* that they feel close to people at their school, feel like they are part of their school, and are happy to be at their school. All items were coded so that higher values indicate greater levels of school attachment.

*Well-being.* Adolescents' well-being reflects their feelings about the quality of relationships with others ("feel loved and wanted" and "feel socially accepted") and perceptions of their own qualities and abilities ("have a lot of energy," "are well coordinated," "are physically fit," "have a lot of good qualities," "have a lot to be proud of," "like themselves the way they are," and "feel they are doing everything just about right"). Respondents agreed or disagreed with each aspect of well-being on a five-point scale (*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree*). The items are combined into a scale of well-being.

### *Transition to Adulthood Predictors*

Transition to adulthood predictors were measured at Wave 3 and included whether respondents are still living with their mother (1 = *live alone or with someone other than mother*, 56%; 0 = *live with mother*), respondents' level of education (1 = *post high school education*, 54%; 0 = *high school or less*), respondents' employment status (1 = *working for pay at least 10 hours per week*, 69%; 0 = *working fewer than 10 hours per week or unemployed*), and the presence of respondents' biological children in the household (1 = *yes*, 19%). Respondents' current union status was measured by a set of three dummy variables for married (14%), cohabiting (13%), or single (73%).

### *Controls*

Gender is a dichotomous variable where 1 = *female* (52%). Age is a continuous variable with a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 18, measured at Wave 1. We used respondents' reports of mother and fathers' highest level of education at Wave 1 to calculate the mean level of parental education for each respondent.

We created dummy variables to control for the effects of race. First, we created five categories, non-Hispanic Whites (57%), non-Hispanic Blacks (17%), Hispanics (18%), Asians (7%), and Other (1%) to compare each racial group separately. We found no significant differences between the four groups. We also compared Whites to all non-Whites but found no significant

results. Interaction terms for race and each of our independent variables were created to test whether race moderated the relationship between offspring’s experiences and changes in father-offspring relationship quality, but it did not. The lack of significant racial differences led us to exclude race as a control from our final models.

Analytic Strategy

First, comparing offspring’s predivorce levels of closeness to mothers and fathers estimates the extent to which parents’ closeness differs. Then by comparing the change in parental-offspring closeness between Waves 1 and 3 among offspring whose parents divorced with those whose parents remained together estimates the extent to which ordinary change in closeness associated with adolescent development is exacerbated by divorce.

To analyze the stability and change in closeness following divorce, two dichotomous variables were created from the four trajectories of change. The first variable is coded 1 if a *high quality relationship is maintained* (25%) and 0 if *those who start out with high levels of closeness experience a decline*. The second variable is coded 1 if a *low quality relationship becomes close* (14%) and 0 if *low closeness remains unchanged*. Logistic regression was employed to examine the extent to which familial and nonfamilial experiences, individual attributes, and transition to adult roles predicted stability and change. Interaction terms were created to see if the resulting patterns differed by offspring age, gender, race, or parent’s education.

Analyses were conducted using the overall sample weight to correct for the differential probabilities of sample selection resulting from factors such as the oversampling of minority groups. The survey data commands (SVY) in STATA (Stata Corporation, 2003) were used to adjust the standard errors of the model estimates for the clustered and stratified design of National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Chantala & Tabor, 1999).

RESULTS

Setting the Stage for Father-Adolescent Closeness Following Parental Divorce

The first goal was to assess the extent to which fathers were more likely to have a secondary

parenting role relative to mothers insofar as closeness is concerned. Table 2 summarizes the results of this comparison. Prior to divorce, 57% of adolescents reported a very close relationship with their father compared to 71% who reported being very close to their mother. A comparable difference (18% vs. 25%) was observed among those reporting quite a bit. Although few respondents reported low levels of closeness to either parent (indicated by ratings of somewhat, very little, or not at all), a greater proportion of offspring (17%) reported low levels of closeness to their fathers compared to mothers (10%). In all but the very lowest levels of closeness, offspring were more likely to be closer to their mothers.

Our second goal was to examine the extent to which the decreased levels of closeness with fathers as well as mothers during adolescence and young adulthood is exacerbated by divorce more among fathers than mothers. We compared the degree of change in father and mother-offspring closeness among adolescents whose parents divorce with that for adolescents whose parents’ marriage remained intact over the 5-year period. Table 3 shows that although there was some decline in father-offspring closeness among youth who did not experience a divorce or separation (28% declined), the degree of change in the divorced sample was much greater (56% declined). Similarly, a greater proportion of those who did not experience a divorce reported increased closeness (19%) compared to individuals whose parents divorced (14%). The proportion who enjoyed a consistently high close relationship with their father was much higher among adolescents whose parents remained married (48%) than among those who experienced a parental divorce (25%). There was no appreciable difference in the two groups reporting

Table 2. Predivorce Levels of Parent-Offspring Closeness (%) for Fathers and Mothers at Wave 1 (Weighted)

How close do you feel to your biological father/mother?	Father-Offspring	Mother-Offspring
Not at all	1.4	.3
Very little	1.9	2.9
Somewhat	13.6	6.9
Quite a bit	25.7	18.9
Very much	57.4	71.1

Note: Unweighted n = 570.



Table 3. *Change in Offsprings' Closeness (%) to Biological Fathers and Mothers (Weighted)*

Trajectory of Change in Closeness	Fathers		Mothers	
	Divorce	No Divorce	Divorce	No Divorce
Decrease	56.5	28.5	26.5	23.6
Increase	14.1	19.7	18.1	16.5
Consistently high	25.1	48.2	54.1	58.4
Consistently low	4.3	3.6	1.2	1.5
$\chi^2$ ( $df = 3$ )	183.19***		4.19	

Note: Unweighted  $n = 483$  (divorce group),  $n = 4,800$  (no-divorce group).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

low father-offspring closeness ( $\approx 4\%$ ). These results indicate that offspring's withdrawal from fathers was much more severe among those whose parents divorced than among those whose marriage remained intact. The majority of offspring maintained a high level of closeness or experienced an improvement in the relationship with their mothers regardless of divorce (72% divorced group and 75% nondivorced group). There was no significant difference in the distributions of change in mother-offspring closeness for the two groups.

In summary, the pattern of stability and change in father-offspring closeness following divorce indicates that the majority (57%) experience a decline but that a quarter (25%) of those who started with a close relationship continued at that level, and a few experienced a relationship that became closer (14%). Given the small number of cases in the group that remained low over time ( $n = 24$ ), any interpretation of the comparison between the respondents in this category with those in another must be interpreted with caution.

*Predivorce and Transition to Adulthood  
Factors Linked to Changes in Closeness*

Logistic regression analyses assessed the way in which early and later life experiences were associated with change and stability patterns in father-offspring closeness. High and stable father-offspring closeness is contrasted with a decline, and low and stable closeness is contrasted with an increase. We first show the life course experiences one at a time, with controls for offspring age, gender, and parental education. There were no significant associations with the three control variables. In a second model, we entered all variables significant at the bivariate level as a group, along with control variables. Early life course ex-

periences were analyzed separately from later life experiences because they are of a different character. They are events rather than behavioral patterns, and we were less certain about the ordering of divorce and these events.

The results displayed in Column 1, Table 4, show significant differences between those who maintained a high level of closeness and those who experienced a decrease in closeness. In terms of predivorce experiences, the results indicate that compared to offspring whose relationship declined following divorce, those who maintained a close relationship with their father had a stronger mother-offspring bond and a greater sense of well-being. When the two significant variables are in the model at the same time (Column 2), neither variable is statistically significant. Because sense of well-being developmentally follows strong bonds with mother, we suspect the mother-child relationship to be the pivotal factor. The correlation between the mother-child relationship and offspring well-being is moderately high ( $r = .48$ ), suggesting that both variables were reduced to nonsignificance when entered into the same equation because of multicollinearity. It appears that a high-quality mother-offspring bond, along with a strong sense of well-being, may encourage nonresident fathers to continue their relationships with their children. Of course, father's continuous closeness could also be contributing to offspring well-being. There were no significant differences between offspring whose close relationship remained high and those whose relationship declined in terms of their transition toward adult roles.

Although not common, 14% of the adolescents studied experienced improved father-offspring relationship quality following divorce. Analyses revealed that compared to offspring who maintained a poor relationship with their father, those

Table 4. Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Patterns of Change in Father-Offspring Closeness (Unstandardized Coefficients, Weighted)

	Consistently High vs. Decrease				Increase vs. Consistently Low			
	1 <sup>a</sup>		2 <sup>b</sup>		3 <sup>a</sup>		4 <sup>c</sup>	
	<i>b</i>	( <i>e<sup>b</sup></i> )	<i>b</i>	( <i>e<sup>b</sup></i> )	<i>b</i>	( <i>e<sup>b</sup></i> )	<i>b</i>	( <i>e<sup>b</sup></i> )
Controls (Wave 1)								
Offspring age			0.17	1.19			−0.25	0.78
Offspring gender <sup>d</sup>			0.43	1.54			−0.06	0.94
Parents' education			−0.07	0.93			−1.75	0.17
Predivorce adolescent variables (Wave 1)								
Mother-offspring bond	2.05*	7.78	1.27	3.56	−0.97	0.38		
Involvement in group activities	0.01	1.01			0.17	1.19		
School attachment	0.37	1.45			−0.30	0.74		
Adolescent well-being	0.69*	1.99	0.53	1.70	0.48	1.62		
Transition to adulthood variables (Wave 3)								
Left mother's household	−0.05	1.05			1.13	0.32		
Post-high school education	0.42	1.52			−2.15**	0.12	−1.75	0.17
Employed at least part-time	0.20	1.22			0.16	1.17		
Live with biological children	−0.19	0.83			2.38*	10.80	1.42	4.14
Married <sup>e</sup>	0.29	1.34			0.25	1.28	−0.41	0.66
Cohabiting <sup>e</sup>	−0.97	0.38			4.96***	142.59	4.54***	93.69
% Maintaining close relationship	25.1				% increase	14.1		

Note: *n* = 381 (consistently high vs. decrease); *n* = 102 (increase vs. consistently low).

<sup>a</sup>Each variable entered separately. All models include controls for offspring age, gender, and parents' education. <sup>b</sup>Model includes only those variables significant in Column 1, plus controls. <sup>c</sup>Model includes only those variables significant in Column 3, plus controls. <sup>d</sup>Reference category = male. <sup>e</sup>Reference category = single.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

experiencing an increase in closeness were less likely to have pursued post-high school education, more likely to become a parent, and more likely to be cohabiting (Column 3). None of the predivorce factors was related to an increase in closeness. Only cohabitation retained its statistical significance after the significant variables were in the equation at the same time (Column 4). Although we must be cautious in interpreting this last set of findings given the modest sample size, it appears that fathers and young adult offspring are more inclined to strengthen their relationship when offspring experience relationship and family transitions such as cohabiting and having children.

#### *Differences by Age, Gender, Parent Education, and Race/Ethnicity*

Interaction terms with control variables were created for each independent variable to examine whether the probability of remaining the same or

changing differed by age, gender, race, and parents' education. The interaction models included the two main components of the interaction term, the interaction term itself, and the remaining control variables. Models with significant interactions are shown in Table 5. We plotted the relationships between our independent variables and changes in father-offspring closeness under two conditions: when age was one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean.

In the case of offspring who maintained a high level of closeness, offspring's age moderated the influence of mother closeness, cohabiting, and becoming a parent. Higher mother affect increased the probability of maintaining a high level of closeness with fathers more so among younger children compared to older offspring (Figure 1). Becoming a parent was linked to maintaining high father-offspring closeness among older youth but to a decline in closeness among younger offspring (Figure 2). Similarly, older offspring who were cohabiting had a higher probability of maintaining

Table 5. Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis With Interactions for Variables Predicting Patterns of Change in Father-Offspring Closeness (Unstandardized Coefficients, Weighted)

	Consistently High vs. Decrease			Increase vs. Consistently Low	
	1	2	3	4	5
Controls (Wave 1)					
Offspring age	0.89*	0.05	0.04	-1.16**	-0.23
Offspring gender <sup>a</sup>	0.37	0.41	0.34	-0.13	0.37
Parents' education	-0.05	-0.06	-0.10	0.04	0.06
Predivorce adolescent variables (Wave 1)					
Mother-offspring bond	22.51*				
Transition to adulthood variables (Wave 3)					
Left mother's household				21.66	
Employed at least part-time					
Live with biological children		-9.80*			
Married <sup>b</sup>			0.33		3.67*
Cohabiting <sup>b</sup>			-10.98*		5.01***
Significant interactions					
Age × Mother-Offspring Bond	-1.37*				
Age × Live With Biological Children		0.63*			
Age × Married			0.02		
Age × Cohabitation			0.66*		
Age × Left Mother's Household				-1.29*	
Gender × Cohabitation					
Gender × Married					-4.04*

<sup>a</sup>Reference category = male. <sup>b</sup>Reference category = single.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

a close relationship with fathers compared to younger cohabitants (Figure 3).

For the group of offspring who experienced an increase in father-offspring closeness following divorce, compared to those who maintained a low level of closeness, the effects of leaving the household also differed by age. There is a higher

probability of an increase in relationship quality for offspring who move away from home at an earlier age than if they leave at an older age (Figure 4).

The only instance in which gender moderated the link between postdivorce closeness and adult transitions is for the transition to marriage. The transition into marriage improves father-offspring relationship quality for sons but has no effect on daughters' relationship quality (Figure 5).

FIGURE 1. EFFECT OF MOTHER-OFFSPRING RELATIONSHIP ON THE PROBABILITY OF MAINTAINING A HIGH LEVEL OF FATHER-OFFSPRING CLOSENESS FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER OFFSPRING.

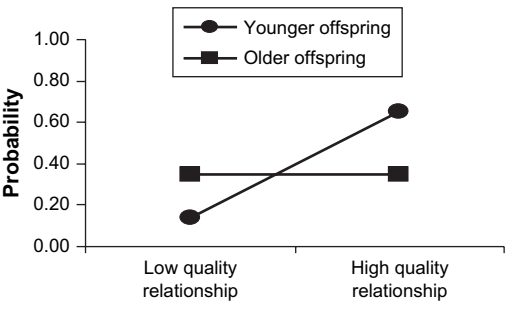


FIGURE 2. EFFECT OF HAVING CHILDREN ON THE PROBABILITY OF MAINTAINING A HIGH LEVEL OF FATHER-OFFSPRING CLOSENESS FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER OFFSPRING.

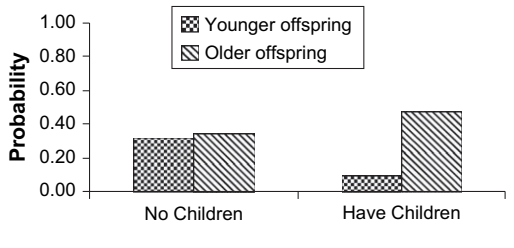
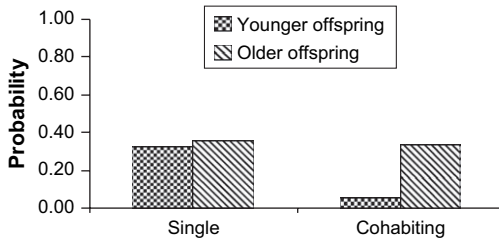


FIGURE 3. EFFECT OF OFFSPRING'S COHABITATION ON THE PROBABILITY OF MAINTAINING A HIGH LEVEL OF FATHER-OFFSPRING CLOSENESS FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER OFFSPRING.



In summary, age and, to a lesser extent, gender moderated some associations between youth experiences and postdivorce father-offspring closeness. Being younger was an advantage when the mother bond was instrumental in maintaining a close father-offspring relationship. Being older was an advantage when cohabitation and becoming a parent helped to maintain that relationship. With respect to increasing the quality of a poor father-child relationship, being younger was an advantage when leaving home and being male was an advantage when marriage was linked to increasing the quality of a poor relationship. Parents' education and offspring's race/ethnicity did not moderate the influence of any of the independent variables.

## DISCUSSION

Parental divorce creates an immense pressure to decrease father-offspring closeness. Obstacles

FIGURE 4. EFFECT OF LEAVING HOME ON THE PROBABILITY OF EXPERIENCING AN INCREASE IN FATHER-OFFSPRING CLOSENESS FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER OFFSPRING.

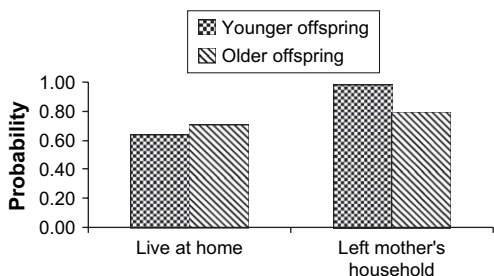
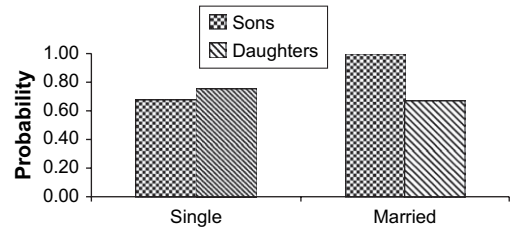


FIGURE 5. EFFECT OF OFFSPRING'S MARRIAGE ON THE PROBABILITY OF EXPERIENCING AN INCREASE IN FATHER-OFFSPRING CLOSENESS FOR SONS AND DAUGHTERS.



to closeness created by not being in the home are likely compounded by the fact that fathers are generally less close than mothers prior to divorce. Resident mother's closeness is virtually untouched by marital dissolution. Despite these obstacles, some very close father-offspring relationships are maintained and some poor relationships become closer.

We found that a predivorce familial experience (mother-offspring relationship quality) and an individual attribute (offspring's feelings of well-being) played major roles in preventing close father-offspring relationships from deteriorating. Age moderated the relationship between the mother-offspring relationship and maintaining a close relationship so that younger offspring were more likely to maintain a close relationship with their fathers if they also had a close relationship with their mothers. Compared to older adolescents, younger adolescents may not be as far along in distancing themselves from their parents and therefore may benefit more from closer parent-child relationships.

Age also moderated the relationship between maintaining a close father-offspring relationship and cohabiting and becoming a parent. Early transitions into cohabitation and childbearing may injure father-child relationships rather than bringing them closer.

For offspring experiencing an increase in closeness following divorce, analyses revealed that lower education, becoming a parent, and cohabitation served to increase closeness in father-offspring relationship that were not close prior to divorce. Perhaps less educated offspring turn to their fathers for financial aid or other types of support, whereas better educated offspring may be more independent, move away

for college, and have fewer reasons for working to improve a relationship that was poor to begin with. Becoming a parent and moving in with a partner may encourage fathers to reconnect with offspring as those offspring take on more adult roles. Similar to cohabitation, marriage appears to increase father-offspring closeness, but only for sons. Fathers may be less accepting of their daughters' choice to marry or may feel less inclined to improve a poor father-daughter relationship when daughters marry.

Leaving home at an early age appears to be more likely to result in relationship improvement than does leaving at a later age. Although we are not able to ascertain the process at work, we expect that this means younger individuals have greater flexibility in shaping their relationship with their father than those who continued to live with their mother for an extended period. Younger offspring may also devote more energy to parent relationship building, even after they leave home.

Postdivorce conflict that occurs long after divorce is often thought to play a key role in father-offspring closeness. Unfortunately, the Add Health data do not contain information in this regard. Other studies suggest that parent conflict is not as serious an impediment to father-offspring closeness as common wisdom suggests. Sobolewski and King (2005), using another nationally representative data set, found that parental conflict was unrelated to nonresident father-adolescent offspring relationship quality. Levels of conflict tended to be quite modest, likely a consequence of the number of years having passed since the parents separated. Other studies indicate that parental conflict tends to decline over time (Arendell, 1986; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Also, conflict is not necessarily "bad." Most intimate relationships involve some conflict, which may be good if it indicates a father's continued engagement as a parent. An absence of conflict does not necessarily imply that the parents are getting along with one another but may indicate that the parents have nothing to do with one another (King & Heard, 1999).

The life course perspective's emphasis on historical context suggests that the steady trend of increased father involvement is a positive development that in years to come may reveal more positive findings than does the present study. Evidence that the timing and sequencing of events are linked to the person's stage of life is manifested in the finding that the typical distancing

from parents that adolescents go through is greatly exacerbated by divorce for fathers but not for mothers. The life course tenet that individuals are active rather than passive was reflected in the way offspring-adolescent experience, and transitions to adult roles made a difference in the quality of father-offspring relationship quality. The interdependence of lives over time is reflected in our finding that divorce is strongly linked to stability and change in father-child relationship quality. It is also evident in the findings that the mother-child bond and a personal sense of well-being prevent a close father-adolescent relationship from declining and that becoming a parent and cohabiting are related to improvements in father-offspring closeness.

The study would have benefited from a larger sample that might have revealed links with more of the variables included in the analyses or other influential predivorce variables linked to postdivorce father-offspring closeness. A larger sample and another interview might have revealed other trajectories of closeness (e.g., ones involving multiple changes) that may influence long-term levels of closeness. The study would have benefited from information on precisely when the divorce occurred relative to the collection of closeness data. Closeness measures just before or just after divorce are likely to be different from those obtained after a longer interval because people are still adjusting to the divorce. Studies indicate that significant adjustment occurs within the first 12 months and is nearly completed in 24 months (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Amato, 1991). We approximated such an analysis by creating an interaction term reflecting the timing of divorce (Occurred Between First and Second Wave/After the Second Wave  $\times$  By Closeness), but it was not statistically significant in any of the analyses. Also, the study would have benefited from information obtained directly from the father with respect to his evaluation of father-child closeness, his perceptions of the importance of the father-offspring link, and his views of the opportunities and constraints that affected pre- and postdivorce closeness. It would also be valuable to know whether offspring confided in fathers, the extent to which youth spent time in the father's home, and the amount of affection expressed between them. Knowing more about the youth's stage of cognitive development and the size and nature of peer networks would help us to more fully understand the context of the link between experience and closeness. Also essential

is information on whether fathers remarried. The appearance of a stepmother in the adolescent's life as well as father's dating may affect father-adolescent relationship quality. Unfortunately, the Add Health Study does not include any information about the biological father's life following divorce.

The developmental period from late adolescence through young adulthood is often called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Developmental psychologists argue that this time is critical to individual development in postindustrial societies. Best outcomes are achieved when youth postpone family formation until the mid-20s allowing an extended period of identity exploration that serves as a foundation for making positive choices and creating a stable, satisfying life structure. Although preservation of close relationships with fathers following divorce via a strong bond with mother and a positive sense of well-being is consistent with positive outcomes during emerging adulthood, becoming a parent and cohabitation are thought to lead to poor outcomes during this period (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Teti & Lamb, 1989). Yet the positive outcomes of early, but not extraordinarily early, parenting and cohabitation for father-offspring closeness is a trend indicating that these family transitions may lead to stronger families. Early childbearing and cohabitation bring non-resident fathers and their offspring closer, which is likely to improve offspring's well-being. Future research should focus on the long-term outcomes of the trends revealed in this study.

Research indicates that the closeness of the father-child bond following parental divorce is associated with better outcomes for children and adolescents. This study adds to knowledge by taking a long-term developmental approach to understanding stability and change in postdivorce father-adolescent relationship closeness. Mother-offspring bond, sense of well-being, and the adult role transitions of leaving home, post-high school educational experience, becoming a parent, and cohabiting or marrying are found to be key in accounting for (a) why some high-quality father-adolescent relationships remain the same and others decline and (b) why some low-quality father-adolescent relationships remain stable and others improve.

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